



## Post Fellowship Reporting - Project Summary

**Report Title:** Investigations into Kenyan ecosystems      **Name:** Kate Belfay  
**Other Team Members:**  
**Program:** New York City Program  
**Trip Dates:** 07/01/2011 - 07/21/2011      **Location Visited:** Nairobi, Kenya  
**Post Fellowship Reporting Template:** PFR Template 01

**Project Summary:** The wildebeest is an ugly animal, it looks like pieces and parts of other animals put together. According to Swahili folklore that is exactly how the wildebeest was created. Every year this half cow, half antelope-like creature treks thousands of miles in search of food and in doing so sometimes becomes food itself. The plains of Kenya are where the real drama of Disney's famous The Lion King plays out and if you are a 9th grader in New York City, the big screen is about as close as you are going to get to witnessing the circle of life. Students are always drawn to Kenya's big predators, huge land mammals, and diversity of life so I decided to bring Kenya to life in our classroom.

I could not have imagined all the teaching moments I experienced while I was exploring the diversity of Kenya. I think I changed my mind about ten times about how and what experience I wanted to bring back for my students. There is so much the land, the people, and the animals taught me from the wildebeest crossing the Mara river in herds fully aware of the crocodiles waiting for them to the humble school teacher with 54 students and no pens or pencils to the small farmer blissfully unaware how his farm is contributing to soil erosion.

My students curiosity attracted me to Kenya in the first place and I have over 5000 pictures, 2 journals, 21 short videos, and numerous artifacts that will allow the students to explore biodiversity, analyze trends in evolution, debate about deforestation and connect with a land and people so full of wonder and mystery they will forget they are in NYC.

**Career Impact:** -Discovered methods to make examples of biological concepts more tangible and accessible.

-Explored new teaching techniques using limited resources.

-Learned new models of biological concepts to use in the classroom.

-Allowed myself to be in awe of a beautiful sight, or sound, or story.

-Gave myself permission to be a student, to look, to listen, to ask questions.

-Discovered that being a teacher is a universal concept, it is not my job rather it is who I am and I can not turn off my love of learning, just ask my Masaai guide who thought I was crazy to take a picture of hyena dung. It is white, why? You will have come to my class to find out

**Classroom/Community Impact:**• Authentic and original stories to enhance student learning and learning experience.

• Opened the doors for collaborative project within other disciplines, specifically global studies and their human origins unit. Most importantly, opened doors of communication across disciplines in new ways with different concepts.

• Able to enhance ecosystem unit with genuine artifacts and engage students with a more challenging curriculum.

• Engage in original research, became a student again and was far removed from my comfort zone.

**Open Response:** Planning a debate where students have to represent individuals from Kenya: a farmer, a tour guide, a politician, an ecologist, an urban businessman, and a Maasai warrior, to highlight the causes and effects of deforestation and resistance to changing farming practices.

Planning to enhance ecosystem unit with the introduction to Kenyan artifacts and photos of Kenyan flora and fauna.

Creating a liaison between Masaai elementary school and our high school to share experiences and culture.

**Quote:** Kenya is a magical place.

Photos:



Me and my friend with the Maasai after our nature walk



Elephants are a large threat to farmers and can be very destructive.



Looking at reading materials with the teacher at the Maasai school.



Kenyans are proud and knowledgeable of their animals and diversity of plant life.



There is a growing effort to protect the threatened mangroves.



Walking to check out a small farm, see the zebras in the background?



This endangered black rhino is in captivity because he is blind.



I made fire with a little help from the Maasai.